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Margaret Postgate's POEMS

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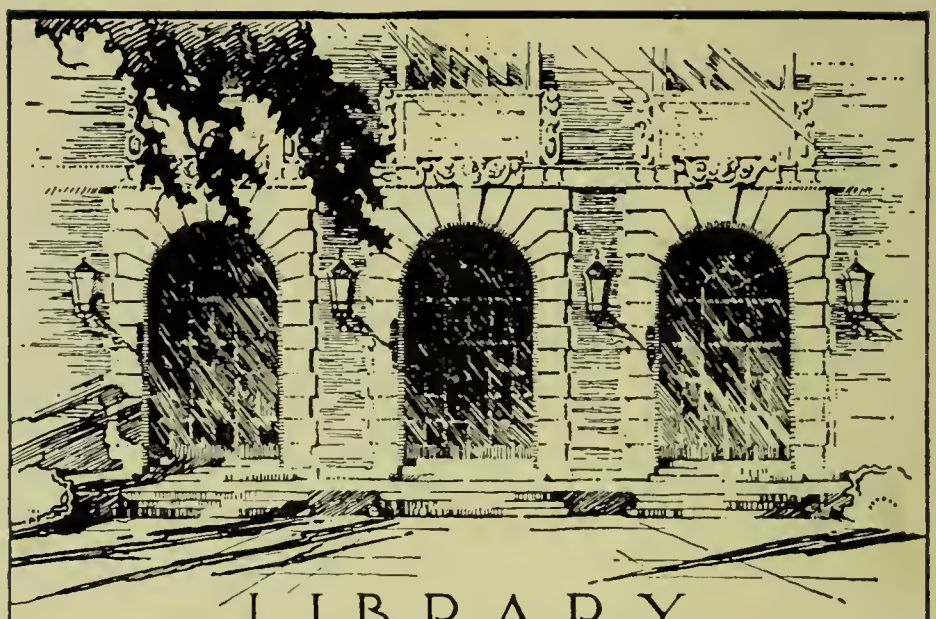

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Margaret Postgate's
POEMS

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Margaret Postgate's Poems

TO ANY MODERN
(in the best manner)

You tell me
The Living Poet of To-day
Knows better than to touch the sentimental subjects
That people thought they liked in Nineteen Thirteen.
He can't abide the stars,
and as for spring, it makes him sick,
and birds are simply nasty,
and love—Good Lord!
But if HE *wants to sentimentalise,*
He'll sentimentalise about a dustbin;
And if he wants to write high poetry,
He writes it—preferably—about a tin-opener, or wet mackintoshes, or an uncovered drain.
Well, I don't like them, and I won't!
I do like
Roses and lovers in lanes and honeysuckle and green woods,
And all the things you find unmentionable.
I will make three hundred and sixty-five poems about the moon.

SONGS

I

THE LOVER TO HIS MISTRESS

GOD *made you fair,*
but I have made you wise;
God moulded you,
but I looked in your eyes;
God shaped your head,
but I set crowns above;
God breathed your voice
—I made it say "I love."

How then should God
have any happier part,
Seeing that you
are creature of my heart?
Ah! He made all,
yet can all things disdain;
I made one thing,
and lo! it hath me slain!

II

FROM THE GARDEN OF DELIGHT

I HAD *not heart to bid your spirit stay,*
And so you went away,
"Only a little way,"
You said, "a little day."
But they that found you set another face
Upon your wilful grace
—O Love! in a strange place.
And when you came again I did not know,
And so I let you go,
Being so slow—

Alack! did you not know?
And now I know you will not come again,
But down another lane
I hear you laugh like running April rain
—O Love! again.

III / THE ECONOMIST

I HEARD *them say*
He works so fine,
Nothing is vain
To His design;
No sting nor thorn
But finds her use,
And all sweet blooms
Their dear excuse.

Shall I then say
In impious thought,
"To no sweet end
Her face was wrought;
The white and rose
That are her breast
Not made by hands
To be caressed?"

Wise is His hand,
And hath not He
Rounded her head
For man to see?
Did He not paint
Her tranquil eyes,
To teach her fool
Of Paradise?

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Then go not hence,
Sweet Love of mine,
Lest you do flaw
His high design;
And turning love
To bitter use,
Steal from your fool
His sole excuse.

AFTER MEETING

If you would have me lover, let me go.
For never shall the years with measured pace
Trample away the dear lines of your face,
A thousand aeons could make no deeper grow
Than these few days—a look, a word, and lo!
Here you are painted for my worshipping,
A marvellous, unhuman, changeless thing
For that bright living spirit I shall not know.
And here I'll bring you gifts as lovers use,
All that you have not sought, all that I prize,
Flung at your feet in one quick sacrifice,
A love that stabs the soul it fears to lose.
Listen all night—and come not when you call,
Love you for ever, and know you not at all.

But if, for all this wilful love of mine,
You yet would call me friend, then bid me stay,
And let your soul, wandering her common way,
Take mine, and hand in hand and line by line
Trace out the delicate paths of your design,
Blur the strange shape my dazzled vision wrought

And make me fellow of your smallest thought,
So of dead love a newer kindness twine.
And, close-knit by a thousand slender strands,
I'll share the day with you, as comrades do,
Holding your heart's desire more dear than you,
Watch as the eye of God that understands.
—But no more listen long nights for your tread,
Nor break my heart because you turned your head.

IMAGES

I

THE *wind of my love all night*
Blows in great gusts about your house,
Where you lie fast alseep, and do not even hear
The window-curtain stirring fretfully.

II

Talking with you,
I am like a bird, that beats and breaks its wings
Against the hard clear window of your pride.

III

Ah, do not leave me,
As an ugly flower-girl is left at night,
With all my love unwanted, withering in my hands.

THE STRANGER

O WHY *were you born of English speech,*
Stranger, stranger I love?
I would in a tongue of the furthest folk
You made your wise lips move.

At least with grammar and lexicon
I'd puzzle a word or so;
But now I have no key to read
This cursed tongue I know.

O would that you lived beyond man's ken
In a distant desolate place
—While here each day and leagues away
I meet you face to face—

At least I would crush the mountains low,
And harrow the sea's grey field,
But here behind your open eyes
Lies fast your spirit sealed.

O dear dark-eyed! the door is wide,
But faster than hill or sea
Are planted the silent boundaries
That guard your soul from me.

And when the film of our thin talk breaks
In desperate silences,
I see as one sees in a looking-glass
The strangeness of your eyes.

O this is the last great loneliness,
And none more desolate
Than I that outside and all too near
Tremble, and whisper, and wait.

And never, I know, shall hands of mine
The bars of your spirit move,
Yet still I wait by your heedless gate,
Stranger, stranger I love.

WHEN WE ARE DEAD

THINK *of it, Love, when we are dead,*
We shall be lying side by side,
Just as now, in a straiter bed,
All night long, when we have died.

But all night long I shall not stir,
Nor reach a restless hand, as now,
To feel if the wild brown waves of hair
Are tangled yet on your sleeping brow.

I shall not listen, Love, in fear,
Lest I should miss a single breath,
Or lose one second, while you are near
—We shall not count the hours in death.

I shall not then lie quivering
To watch you smile in your sleep, apart,
Jealous of each uncharted thing
That holds for a moment your wayward heart.

But there in a heedless strange repose
My body shall lie that your lips did burn,
And marvel to know you close—so close—
Yet all night long I shall not turn.

SPACE

Small and obscure they say my dwelling is,
The window "Very scanty, set too high."
They've measured them correctly with a rule,
Allowed for all, except the sky and you.
But in my window lives the sky,
Where nightly walk in endless ranks
The white processions of the stars;
And inside on the narrow couch,
Close as the fruit within the flower,
You lie asleep within my arms.
So pace away, with rule and measuring tape!
Count all the boards, and reckon up the panes
—Outside I watch the immeasurable night,
Within I keep our love's infinity.

THE CANDLES

There are two candles burning by your head
With pale unshaken flames;
And something, I had thought, you smiled and said
With your soft voice I loved so well just now.
You did not know—did you?—that you were dead.
But I can see
You lying stiff and still with white hands crossed,
And wide blind eyes upturned, and quiet lips.

And burning still, the candles of the bier
—Two candles at your head, two at your feet—
Blow little quivering masses for your soul,
That died just now, when that you said three words
—Only three words, and killed yourself for ever.
Beloved, did you know it? You are dead.

Ave Maria—see! with dark cowled heads,
And fingering beads, the mourning shadows pass
By wall and corner as the candles burn,
Ora pro nobis, Jesv, murmuring,
Miserere . . . O beloved, O beloved,
Speak to them! tell them that you are not dead!
You did not speak the words that killed you now
In a few moments . . . will you tell them?—
Nay,
No use to speak—I cannot hear your voice,
For watching those four pale unwavering flames,
—Two candles at your head, two at your feet—
And your hands lying crossed.

BY CANDLELIGHT

O I have endured your eyes a thousand years,
Looking so close, looking so far away;
I have borne to watch your head so near my hands,
Bowed with the thing you would, but will not say;
But this one thing I will not take for your giving
To-day, nor any day.

Long have I steeled my soul to hear you say
Things that have slain me, terrible kindnesses,
Comfort that cut like a sword, lies all unavailing;
Yea, I have drunk the misery of your kiss;
All that you bade me take I have clasped like a beggar,
All, save only this.

Have you not seen then, O dark eyes all too wise,
Your hands from mine divided as seas apart?

Have you not wondered, O tender, O cruel lips,
How those light fingers of yours should make
me start?
Careless then are you, or blind, that you will not
spare me
Your hands upon my heart?

MOONRISE

THE *hard clear sky is melting into grey*
Behind the eastward chimneys. How long now
Has this black night lain brooding on the world?
So long, my dear, this stranger that is you
Sits close to me, since, these few hours ago,
Sped by the burning fury of my heart,
Yourself did pass the door. O Love, my Love!
When did I love you? The red western light
Danced on your hair, and you were beautiful,
Aye, fair for ever as the evening sun
On the wet roofs: now by my side there sits
Someone with cold strange lips and eyes that stab
Like the sharp stars in a November night,
Hard as the darkness . . . in an hour . . .
Forgive?

O, easily you may forgive, and I,
I had forgiven you twice ten thousand times,
If only it were you I must forgive
—The sweet wild soul of yesterday, the love
That sprang wide-armed to meet me half-denying
The friendship, and the dancing tenderness,
Hands quick to caress, and shining eyes,
Fresh with the joy of our discovery—

Was not this you?—not you? . . .
The east is white;

The night fades; and the bitter vision of you
Is paling like the stars in the grey sky
Before the moon of your first loveliness.

TREACHERY

You need not pity me. I shall not die,
Though you have held me in your arms some time,
And taken freely, for an hour's delight,
The best I had of love, the best of rhyme.

You bid me, loving you, lay by the thought
Of trampled souls and wild knight-errantry
—Lightheart I take my lance in hand again,
And in an hour forget you utterly.

You would have filled my days with memories,
Shot the white moonlight with the colour of you;
That every blackbird's song should be a dirge,
And no flower bloom but rosemary and rue.

Still rain lies grey across the fields, and still
Violet and blue the lightning on the sea;
And some day, when your face is not so clear,
I shall find lime as sweet as any tree.

So be not flattered, you that flung me by,
Nor pity my "eternity of pain";
Only, when you lie dreaming, be content.
There is one dream I shall not dream again.

RUMOURS

I NEVER *told them. Other men, I know,*
Would have cried all their story to the air,
Or stood beneath our lovely avenue,
Telling the limes how beautiful you were.

I only whispered it one night, alone—
And now each way I turn my head, I see
The lamps and curtains talking of the tale,
And all the crowded shadows muttering
"He———

"He loved, and was forgotten"—did you hear?
And yet I dare not leave the noisy place,
Lest, wandering down the lonely avenue,
I find the lime-trees laughing in my face,

EXORCISM

I WOULD *have given everything*
Not to have loved you in the summer.
For summer is my time of year,
With the warmth and sweetness and song and the long late evenings,
And the drenching grass at dawn, and the changing colours,
—And what is summer when you are everywhere?

I want to cry
To the trees: Put off your green, for I cannot bear it,
Because of a certain face I always know

Lies just out of sight, in a pool of the green shadow;
To say to the grass: Do not grow long and silver,
For a flicker of wind in the furthest corner
Sooner or later must brush the stems apart,
And there between the stems I shall see her lying;
To the may and the lilac: Do not bloom this year,
For under your heavy boughs my dear will stand
With the flowers falling on her dress,
And her voice and the scent will blow to me every evening.

Oh, go away, go away! and leave me the summer,
And hide in the dark seasons of the year.
Take to yourself the winter for your dwelling.
Was not your smile like a pale sun
Shining coldly and late on the frozen fields?
Your eyes as cold and sharp as November stars,
And your hair like tangled twigs when the leaves are gone?
Is not your voice thin,
And bitter as the wind in the dry stubble?
Dear God—dear God—
What's the use of talking?
Here's June again, and the blackbirds in the orchard,
And my feet always lead me
Down by the lime-trees, with the lime-flowers falling.

A PRAYER

Let others pray to lose the memory
That burns like fire in me,
Her lips, her head, her hands, her very name
Written in leaping flame;
Pray that the common tracks may be as sweet
As light prints of her feet,
Saying that gentle wise friends' constancy
Is kindlier far to see
Than that wild dawn came flooding from her face
—So, in a cavern place,
Might one whose birth was glorious with sun
Forget, with night foredone,
The wonderful, tangled colours of the sky,
When day rose marvellously,
And the still brilliant noon, and fearful light
Strewing the path of night,
And murmur that a candle flickering dim
Was best of light to him
—No! though she has not turned nor loved me, yet
God, let me not forget!
But passionately more as hopelessly
Treasure her face to me;
And since my brief sun cometh not again
Guard as my life my pain
That only teaches me I am not dead:
But let her curving head,
Her puzzled forehead, and her wise dark eyes,
Her hair's dear mysteries,
O God! her curious chin, and lips like wine,
Her body's splendid line,

Grow clearer and fiercer as the thronging days
Whirl in an endless maze
Of Good *and* Bad *for men, and* Loss *and*
Gain,
But never Best *again;*
Until this fire burn my breast away,
And in the last great day
With its keen touch upon my heart I die,
Of her, contentedly.
Then this line only write above my head—
"He was not comforted."

WISDOM

Since *I left off to love you, I have not*
Walked with my soul so close unto the skies;
When I would make all earth a sacrifice
Wherewith my piteous pleading soul had bought
Your love a little moment, one wild thought
Of me an instant troubling your tranquil eyes;
And you would none, but pitifully wise
Stood far, and mine own soul her torment
wrought.
Now I do go with stranger men, whose eyes
Set not my body aflame, whose pleasant thought
I do not wish to learn—Am I not wise,
That of such pain such colourless peace have
wrought?
Since I left off to love you, I have not
Walked with my soul so close unto the skies.

EXILE

October

Four walls about me,
Four warm walls
With heated pipes and curtains
—And the rain falls
Outside and ever
On woods aflame to the sky,
And the green water-meadows
Where the great winds go by.

And within the walls about me
Twenty warm souls and wise
Expound to each and other
Life's mysteries
—But oh! I cannot listen
(And you talk so endlessly)
For thinking of the great meadows,
And the winds, how they go by.

SWEEPING THE LEAVES

February

Oh, let the leaves lie! They'll not come to rest
For all the silly sweeping of our brooms.
They heard one sing in the blue powdered sky,
And are no more dead than that squat grey tower
Our saint built, solemn as a Sunday hat,
That would now fly away with a puff of the wind,
So fine, ethereal a cobweb seem
His stones, when spring looks out in February.
No, let's go marching, broom on shoulder; then
We'll sweep the dusty lumber from the school,

The verbs and dates, the little marks and rules
Piled thick upon the corners and the walls,
Drawing a trail of powder-blue behind,
Clear as this sky, with a trace of coming stars
—Oh, do you think they'll stare on Monday morning?
Or better, let us never go in again,
But wander dancing with the dancing wind
—The wind that's caught your girdle and your fair hair
In a wild measure—dancing through the world,
Sweeping the laughing stars to winking heaps
That God may have bare paths to walk upon,
Bare paths, and the bare wind lifting His hair.
—O, the blind ones are you, that sit indoors,
Carefully correcting little exercises
With little red-ink pens, and little murmurs
"Someone has left the door wide, and the wind
*Is scattering papers; and it's chilly"—*OH!
While we are sweeping leaves up on the paths!

INSTANS VER

April

PRAY *for my soul,*
That sleeps just at the level of the street
On a frequented bus-route; and to-day
Lay hearing in the misty April dawn
A swallow, twittering as you'd find them now
Beneath a crumbling roof in Madingley.

BEDRIDDEN

May

All the winter I have lain and looked at the church,
Across the square, through the black bones of the trees,
The little church, a sharp grey narrow tower,
Where a creaking bell clangs unevenly,
And the people come hatted and gloved on Sunday morning.
All winter long I have heard the thin wind scream,
And whirl the few last leaves from the dripping gardens,
Black with a London autumn, against the church,
Weak as small drops of spray against a wall,
Shivering and pitiful, and praying to be let in
—All winter long they have beat at the windows in vain.

. . . . . .

Only this morning I cannot see the church,
Because there has broken a great green sea
Over the gardens and the thin-ribbed trees,
And drowned my little church with a wave of spring.

CEDARS

August

Night is most beautiful,
When all perception comes by ear and hand,
And eyes, all day oppressed with too much seeing,
Nay gaze and gaze, at rest.

Therefore should we be glad
Of cedar-trees, that all the August noon
Keep, treasure-wise, in their cathedral boughs
This deep, transparent night.

HONEYSUCKLE IN TOWN

July

There should be hedges strewed with wild roses,
The white sweet roses that shine like little stars
In the west heavens when the moon walks slow
Along the common-side—and dew-deep fields
Where bare feet make no sound that tread at night.
And cornfields grey and stirring with the wind
By White-Leaf Cross; and all the kindly things
That softly sound—the last late nightingale
Half-mazed and stammering with delight, to smell
The lime-trees dropping sweetness; water trickling
Through Shardeloes; and lifting leaves of beech.
And all things that smell sweet—white jasmine growing
At little casements; honeysuckle trails;
And beasts like mountains; and the warm deep earth

Heavily good to feel—O, there should be
Pale curving roads still under the stars,
Where men do walk and walk, knowing that God
Will make the night eternal suddenly.
And there should be a moon on Wendover.
Only—there is no more than this brown bowl
Brimming with honeysuckle, gathered once
Far in the quiet hedges of Buckingham;
Whereof the very fragrance, eddying
Through open door and window, blotted out
A moment, all the pavements and the walls,
The straight street glittering to the yellow lamps,
With sight of green woods ripening to their fall
As the year swings—O exiled honeysuckle,
Is it June gone from us, and we not knowing?

SPECIES ÆTERNITATIS

August 1915

Oh, *I have tried to tell you how I love you*
So long, and vainly; for it is but words,
Words that are hot and feeble, and from words
I turn to you for certainty, as now,
Heavy with feverish light, and shrill quick voices
Of this strange city, one may lie, and know
The mist drives down on Carnedd still; and still
The sea lies by the pier; and the peaked hills
Stand silent under the sunlight, waiting us,
Until we waken from our dream, and come
To our own places . . .
This I have tried to say,
Vainly; yet we keep something more than words;
That walked among the silence of the hills.

MOMENTS

LIVE, young lovers, for Time runs fast
A little while to love and cry.
As the Rose blooms, her bloom is past,
And she must die—and so you die
Thus the Gardener, shears in hand
Muttered his thoughts to a gaping band.
But see the reddening Rose—she grew
So sweet with feeding on death, think you?

We'll gather a brief joy while we may—
Aye, brief indeed, O sadly wise
With thought of To-morrow who kill To-day,
Which sweet as a bursting Rose-bud lies.
For Past and Future's gathered sweet
You drain in a life, w ein one heart-beat
And your years are three-score and ten
—but we
By moments live of eternity.

THE LOOKING-GLASS

EACH *time I stand before my glass,*
I see my love for you
Filling its cool dark substance with a flame,
—As a golden lily fills a shadowed pool—
A perfect flame of longing—
—O my beloved, look!
look, look in the grey mirror, where my love
opens, a lily of flame before you!

Each time I turn back from my glass,
And sit in that great chair
Among the cowering shadows of the room,
I see my love break on the pool's hard edge
And splash the walls with colour—
—O my beloved, look!
look round about the tall room, where my love
flickers and fawns upon the walls before you!

For night and day within the glass,
Sunken, unquenched, it burns;
If you would come but once, you'll surely see,
Daytime or night, the everlasting flame,
And turn your heart to pity—
—O my beloved, look!
look, look in my eternal glass, and see
day and night long my love burning before you!

She heard, and came before my looking-glass,
Where I stood watching night and day
The flame-flower of my love burst into bloom.
But, even as she drew near,
The golden petals withered and were gone,
Faded the fiery image in the glass,
And in its place
Floated her still and lovely face alone,
And that was all the image that she saw
—Her own face, like a drifting lovely moon,
A pure cold light, on the dark glass before her

DESMOTES

April 1916

They have taken you into a timeless place,
And I, whose present joy is time,
Is the slow delightful changing of the long fields at my window,
And all things that are never an hour the same,
Out of all those glories that would make you drunk only to know they were there,
Mayn't send you one tall cowslip from the hedges,
Not the white tips of the beeches, like white flowers leaping to the sun,
Not an infinitesimal rabbit running across the road
(He nearly blundered into me)
Even this pink and perfect slug
Would hardly pass your Censor in an envelope.

But the incredible blossom will fall, and the woods darken,
And you won't know—how should you?
Stone walls don't generally burst into flower,
And hang themselves with trails of blackberries,
Nor do paved yards gape open with heather splitting the flags,
And turn to sudden purple and gold,
As though a drunken painter spilt his pots—or do they?
There are stranger things have happened.
How much, do you think, could one conjecture,
From a square blot of changing sky?
Well, I shall not know, nor will you.
All I can do,

With eyes and mouth and brain choked full of the spring,
Is daily to send my brimming spirit southwards there, believing
My most uncensored thoughts will find you there.

EPICURE

My *love is not so lovely when she sits*
With bent head and drawn forehead, with close lips
Pressed in so hard a line, you would not know
How they can curve to smile—and then her eyes
Are hidden, and the sullen tortured brow
Laden with fruitless thinking—so would you,
Waiting as I wait, wonder I love her so.
But if I call her softly, O I know
The wonderful lifting flash of her grey eyes,
As when one clambering a heavy down,
Sees, with the last step raising his tired face,
The clear grey sudden sea beneath him spread
—And then the sweet full smile of her, the fine
Light laughter-lines that blow across her cheek . .
Thus would she look, thuswo uld she smile, I know
—I had almost breathed her name, to lift her eyes,
Lest you should not believe how grey they are.
But see you, if I call her, and she turn,
Then have I all, perfect most perfected,
You think perhaps . . . and yet . . . were there no more
That man should dream of—Were it not better worth

To hold hand, breathless, dreaming here, and
know
Within a whisper that grey glorious flash,
The infinite perfection of her face.
—So I sit silent, and she has not turned.

ASPIRATIONS

DOWN *at the end of our garden*
Beyond the green gate
I can see the old Widow walking
Early and late;
She has a little path, red-tiled,
And her cat goes trotting behind her,
While she picks ALL *the carnations*
—And nobody at all to mind her,
'Cos she's a Widow.

There's nobody at all to say to her
"Now, mind your pinafore, do!"
Or "Keep your fingers from the raspberries;
"They're not for you!"
And "Lord, what a trouble men are!
"Why CAN'T *you wipe your feet on the*
mat?"
You never get in nobody's way then
—Only yours, and the cat—
When you're a Widow.

And she's got roses and creepers,
And a garden just full of flowers,
Not bothered with turnips and cabbages
Like ours.

And she's got a yellow tin of biscuits
Just for her own self to eat
—'Cept when little girls come to tea with her—
O, mustn't it be fine and sweet
To be a Widow?

My mother says "Don't you marry,"
(To folks at tea)
"Your men'll worry your lives out,
"So crankety."
And all shake their heads and say they'd never,
But I'm not sure
If it wouldn't be worth while marrying
For a month, or a bit more
To be a Widow.

PYJAMAS

I HAVE *dreamed of many people through my days,*
Known, long since, all the folk I fain would meet,
Pondered their thoughts, learnt their delightful ways,
Watched for their faces walking down the street.

And some I have met, that have been goodly friends,
Quick and kind as I thought; and some I knew
I'd look for vainly till the long world ends,
But you—I never thought of you at all.

Curled on a stool, with legs tucked closely in,
Short tongue stuck out in ribald ecstasy,
Blue baby's eyes, and small absurd round chin,
And fair hair flying—what's all this to me?

Not only stubborn pluck, and vivid sense,
Not only laughter good and fresh to hear,
Frank friendliness, and boy's glad confidence;
What was it. O you terrier with cocked ear?

What matter, since I love you? . . . Only—
Think,
How should one, dreaming a thousand days and more,
Have seen you squatting there serene, with pink
Pyjama trousers trailing on the floor?

DEATH

THIS *is a strange thing . . .*
They say that you have been a long while dying,
So long
That they could watch the life go day by day
But I know there is no such thing as dying,
Only death.

For I know that all these days I have seen you lying,
Thinner and weaker, a little, and sometimes sleeping,
And sometimes strange and beaten and strung with pain;
But all the while

It was you was watching with your quiet eyes,
And you that spoke, and sighed,
Hearing the wheels pass in the endless nights.

And all at once, wide-eyed and still you lay,
Watching me steadily,

Your fingers in the old accustomed place,
Just by the blanket's edge,
And your hair lying in brown curves about your face—
Oh! but the live blood in your finger-tips,
And the quickness of your hair,
Suddenly, suddenly,
Not anywhere!

WISHING

I WISH *I could stop remembering your face.*
I wish you had a face that nobody could remember,
At least, like that nice kind one's introduced to, and forgets,
Seventeen times a day;
That one might pass you on the other side of the street,
—Brain for a minute mercifully asleep—
Without eyes crying out: "Look there! look there! Look who is passing!"
I wish you wouldn't say such unexpected things, and never know you've said them.
I wish you wouldn't have so many uninteresting plans, and be as busy as a baby with them

I wish you wouldn't go on holidays with deadly people,
and be quite idiotically happy there.
I wish you'd always be alone.
I wish—Damn! I suppose I wish you loved me.

ON A PIERROT SHOW

August 1914

A SCRAP *of tinsel hung against the night;*
Around, dark silent hills and silent sea;
But here's a world that plays unheedingly,
A few thin planks, a flaring crimson light.

And here they sing, and play, and scrape, and bow,
Fancy kind faces in the shades that press,
Nor seem to see the night's black emptiness
—And one small board to shield them—as we now,

That have watched all our pleasant dream of light
Break, like a bubble, on the war's dark ways
—And what is all the pageant of our days?
A threadbare tinsel hung against the night.

OCTOBER NIGHT, 1915.

A FROSTY *night, an orange-rising moon,*
A delicate mist, a sky grey-lit with stars,
In the cool air a fine tranquillity,
A still and splendid peace—This is the night
When the earth sleeps, and in the gentle dark

Of this first moon-week, clear with promised light,
But yet pure darkness, dreams, and doth conceive
All that the spring of beauty or deep strength
Shall bring to birth; such harmony is here.
A golden slip of moon low down the sky,
A mist of stars . . . Oh, shall I never see
Such a fair night of early moon, but still
Turn my eyes quickly, lest I see again
The split sky racked with light, and shattering sound,
Flung in great waves, from each pole pouring back,
A flaming birth of momentary stars,
And pain, pain, pain, out of the dark
Suddenly falling . . . the dark that was . . . that is
A quivering veil of stars, a quiet night.

SPRING SONG, 1917

"The Spring is gone out of the year."
PERICLES on the young men who fell in the war.

O APRIL'S *running out and out*
With strong winds blowing,
And every day we wait and look
For green things growing.
But every day that wakens, sees
The thrush still plain in the barren trees,
Singing his puzzled melodies
Where once were leafy places
In this strange leafless spring.

O was there ever a spring like this
With thrushes singing,
And shining sky and May at hand
And no green springing?
Ah, there was never a spring like this,
For when was there a year like this,
Or a people desolate as this,
Whose captains in high places
Have stolen away the spring?

EPITAPHS

I

ASK *me not whether he were friend or foe*
That lies beneath,
Nor whether in a worthy fight or no
He came to death.
Pass on, and leave such reckonings unmoved,
Remembering now
Here lieth one who gave for that he loved
A greater gift than thou.

II

To him who lieth here
Great peace shall be
Laid by securely with the growing seed.
To you that sent him here
Good memory
We wish you all your days, of this your deed.

III

Here lies
A lover of sweet music, near the guns

IV

Here lies unmarked
The soul of a man. A shell
Buried it here, with power of thought and
speech.
His mortal parts die slowly in Hertfordshire.

V

Here lies
In five square yards
Material for twenty monuments,
And half a hundred tablets, suitably inscribed.

JULY 26, 1916

It is not true. There were a thousand ways,
By bog and heather and bracken and shaven
moor
You might have gone; you chose the single track
That led to the armoured ships & the untrue sea.

Now though I follow the thousand heathery
ways
About and about, ever at last they come
To that green single track that over the hill
Drops, and dies suddenly by the pathless sea.

THE VETERAN

May 1916

We *came upon him sitting in the sun,*
Blinded by war, and left. And past the fence
There came young soldiers from the Hand and
Flower,
Asking advice of his experience.

And he said this, and that, and told them tales,
And all the nightmares of each empty head
Blew into air; then, hearing us beside,
"Poor chaps, how'd they know what it's like?"
he said.

And we stood there, and watched him as he sat,
Turning his sockets where they went away,
Until it came to one of us to ask
"And you're—how old?"
"Nineteen, the third of May."

PRÆMATVRI

WHEN *men are old, and their friends die,*
They are not so sad,
Because their love is running slow,
And cannot spring from the wound with so sharp
a pain;
And they are happy with many memories,
And only a little while to be alone.

But we were young, and our friends are dead
Suddenly, and our quick love is torn in two;
So our memories are only hopes that came to
nothing.
We are left alone like old men; we should be dead
—But there are years and years in which we
shall still be young.

THE FALLING LEAVES

November 1915

TO-DAY, *as I rode by,*
I saw the brown leaves dropping from their tree
In a still afternoon,
When no wind whirled them whistling to the sky,
But thickly, silently,
They fell, like snowflakes wiping out the noon;
And wandered slowly thence
For thinking of a gallant multitude
Which now all withering lay,
Slain by no wind of age or pestilence,
But in their beauty strewed
Like snowflakes falling on the Flemish clay.

REST

REST, REST—*They say you have gained eternal rest.*
REST, REST, *says the brass tablet above your cenotaph,*
REST *in some far and elderly Paradise,*
REST, ETERNAL REST FOR THE TIRED SPIRIT.
The tired spirit—yours!
This is a pleasant joke of the leading gods,
Who with such nice discrimination grant
Death, and eternal rest to you who sought
Nothing but life and the continuance
Of the good restless striving here,
The freshness of the day, the play of mind,
The many wrongs you found to set to rights,
The fight renewing daily with the world.
—So they gave you eternal rest. And kept for us
Life, and the peculiar pleasure of living on.

RECRUITED—POPLAR

March 1917

THEY SAY—THEY SAY
(And that's the bugles going all the day
Past Coopers' Arms and round by Stepney way
Till you'll be mad for hearing of them play)

THEY SAY—THEY SAY
You were the finest stuff men ever had
To make into a soldier. And they say
They put the needed strength and spirit in you,
Straightened your shoulders, made you clean and
true,
And fit for England's service—I can say
They clothed you warm, and fed and worked you
fair
The first time in your life, on Derby Day;
Maybe that did a little—Anyway
They made a man of you this year, the sort
That England's rich and proud to own, they say
—THEY SAY—THEY SAY—
And so they went and killed you. That's their way.

AFTERWARDS

OH, *my beloved, shall you and I*
Ever be young again, be young again?
The people that were resigned said to me
—Peace will come and you will lie
Under the larches up in Sheer,
Sleeping,
And eating strawberries and cream and cakes—
O cakes, O cakes, O cakes, from Fuller's!
And quite forgetting there's a train to town,

Plotting in an afternoon the new curves for the world.

And peace came. And lying in Sheer
I look round at the corpses of the larches
Whom they slew to make pit-props
For mining the coal for the great armies.
And think, a pit-prop cannot move in the wind,
Nor have red manes hanging in spring from its branches,
And sap making the warm air sweet.
Though you planted it out on the hill again it would be dead.
And if these years have made you into a pit-prop,
To carry the twisting galleries of the world's reconstruction
(Where you may thank God, I suppose
That they set you the sole stay of a nasty corner)
What use is it to you? What use
To have your body lying here
In Sheer, underneath the larches?

ENVOY

BECAUSE *I am happy,*
You will get no set songs out of me.
When I was sad and lost,
Then desolation and shame held fast my tongue,
And I was silent before the eyes of men.
And all my heart I wrote upon scraps of paper
In brooded lines and sore poetic phrases.
But now,
No one looks in my face but sees my gladness,
And no one hears me speak but knows it all.

I have proclaimed it in the streets
In the commonest of words;
I have made it plain in every movement,
And even in my silence there is something of a song.
What place is there then for music? what for
rhymes?
All that I do is my song to you, my darling.

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